

'We celebrate with singing'

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By LINDA ANDRADE RODRIGUES

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DARTMOUTH — Renate Hamer, 85, has always had a song in her heart. A native of Linz, Austria, she began writing music as a young child.

Mrs. Hamer remembers the day with

"I walked for a week," she said. "A lot

More than half a-century ago she married a New Bedford native. Settling here, the couple joined the Congregational

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ve of Linz, Austria, she began writing

the Nazi occupation of her homeland.

and New Bedford native. Settling here,

Over the years Mrs. Hamer continued to compose and perform on the organ and piano at SouthCoast churches.

"I like melodies and harmonies," she said. "It's a gift from God."

In celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth, Mrs. Hamer will present the cantata "We Celebrate with Singing" at 10 a.m. tomorrow. The piece will be performed by the church choir with visiting members from Smith Mills Congregational Church of North Dartmouth. The community is invited to attend.

"Music is a language Renate is very good at," said Dr. William Haffner-Jones, music director at the church. "It is pleasant to work when text and music language coincide. She writes very well for voices."

Based on Psalm 136, the composition makes use of the hymn tune "Dundee." The congregation joins in at the end of the cantata.

Following the service will be a coffee hour featuring a history corner. A timeline populated with special events in the life of the church also will be displayed.

"At the end of the timeline is a place for church members to share their hopes and dreams for the church for the next 200 years," said Cecelia Roberts, chairperson of the Bicentennial Steering Committee.

The theme of the nine-month celebration is "Building a Loving, Living Church since 1807."

Two hundred years ago a small group of men and women met to organize the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth. Services were held in the homes of the members and in the neighborhood schoolhouse.

In 1815 a severe gale ravaged the coast, and the church records were destroyed when the dwelling where they were kept was swept away.

"We don't have original records and documents," Mrs. Roberts said. "We simply have recollections of members."

Two years later the cornerstone was laid, and the Middle Street church was dedicated to the worship of God.

Red-cushioned, straight-backed pews occupied the center of the church with aisles on the sides and one row of pews close to the wall. There were doors to the pews and low wooden stools in each pew to kneel upon. Members of the congregation brought their own foot-warmers to take away the chill from the drafty floor.

It must have been considered proper in the early days to use chewing tobacco during church service, as evidenced by the number of old receptacles found in the sanctuary.

In 1828 a fire destroyed the store of Gideon Sherman and 30 years of church records that had been kept there in a safe.

A fire gong was installed in the belfry of the church in 1921 by the South Dartmouth Fire Association. It seldom disturbed Sunday morning service by its ringing.

During a Sunday service in 1930, a fire broke out in the church. Rushing back into the burning structure, parishioners salvaged the organ, pulpit furniture, piano and hymn books.

Before the embers of the blaze had cooled, the church members decided to repair the church immediately.

Today there are 350 active members of the Congregational Church of South Dartmouth.

"The church is quite small, one of the smallest sanctuaries around," said the Rev. Elizabeth King, interim pastor. "It is almost a square, not a long rectangle, and very unusual for a Congregational church. It comfortably seats 250 and has a very intimate quality — almost like a chapel."

For more information or to share church memorabilia, call (508) 993-6676 or visit _____ .net"

> _____ .net">www.congochurchsd. _____ .net.

Contact Linda Andrade Rodrigues at

calendar of events

Celebration kicks off with worship service at 10 a.m. Highlight of the service is a cantata written by longtime parishioner Renate Hamer.

Board of Trustees will host a Pancake Brunch after 10 a.m. service. Guests will be asked to share their favorite stories and memories of their experience in the life of the church. Stories will be documented in written form in the church history.

Ways and Means Committee will sponsor a Pot Luck Dinner. A local historian will lecture on the whaling influence in the community. Children will be treated to a movie in the upper social hall with an Irish flair.

Board of Christian Outreach will coordinate a day of community service. Members are currently researching local social service agencies as well as seeking parishioners who may be in need of some household work. It is hoped that over 100 volunteers will be recruited to complete the coordinated effort.

Religious Education Committee will hold the "Congo Cafe - A Celebration of the Arts!" This event highlights the talented youth of the congregation by showcasing individual talents in music, theatrics or other areas of interest. A light menu will be available in a cafe setting. Paintings, photographs and other media will be displayed in the hall for everyone to enjoy.

Children's Sunday will offer another opportunity for fellowship. The traditional end of the Sunday School year is celebrated with a picnic sponsored by the Executive Committee. Gardening Group will create a Bicentennial Garden, where members will create a legacy to the church. Stepping stones made by members will be used to design the walkway to the garden. Tours of the gardens throughout the church yard will be offered with live narrators. Youth Fellowship will unearth the time capsule that was buried 25 years ago at the 175th Anniversary Celebration, and they will work to create another capsule to be buried on the church grounds for the next celebration.

A video/pictorial presentation will be put together to capture the words and thoughts of many of the church's longtime members. DVD presentation will premiere at the banquet finale at the Hawthorne Country Club in Dartmouth.

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